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ABSTRACT

This paper describes three case studies of interactions between mothers and their kindergarten children. Mothers and children were of Puerto Rican descent and lived in a midwestern city. Children were bilingual, but used English more competently than Spanish. During the children's kindergarten year, researchers observed mother-child interactions in the home. Observations were also conducted in the children's classrooms. Verbal interactions in the home were recorded and the recordings transcribed. Two interaction types, instructional and informal, based on whether the mother played the role of a teacher, were identified from the transcripts. A total of 49 percent of verbal utterances had an instructional intent, and 51 percent were informal. Interactions between the children and their mothers are described, and transcriptions of some verbal exchanges are provided. Interactions between the children and their teachers are also described. These studies imply that teachers should: (1) avoid stereotyping of minority parents; (2) individualize their work with parents; and (3) learn from mothers about creating language-rich environments. The studies also suggest the need for research on interactions between parents and children of families of various cultural backgrounds and on the relation of children's learning experiences at home to their experiences at school. A list of 28 references is provided. (BC)

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A Case Study of Parent Involvement in the Homes of Three Puerto Rican Kindergartners

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Abstract

The purpose of this work was to develop a case study of parent-child learning interactions--one aspect of parent involvement--in the homes of three English dominant Puerto Rican kindergartners. Ethnographic techniques were used to collect data on interactions, language use, and school performance.

Learning interactions appeared to take place in all three homes. There were differences between the homes, suggesting within-group variability. The findings also suggest that learning at home should be considered in relation to learning at school in order to understand the children's school performance.

Implications for practice include the need for teachers to individualize parent involvement and to learn about learning in students' homes. More ethnographic research on parent-child interactions in families from diverse cultures is needed.

A Case Study of Parent Involvement in the Homes of Three Puerto Rican Kindergartners

The literature on parent involvement is almost unanimous in describing it as a necessary part of all children's schooling. Despite the fact that little systematic research has been conducted on the relationship between characteristics of programs and outcomes (Becher, 1986), parent involvement is seen as critical to the development of academic achievement, cognitive development, self-esteem, motivation, and self discipline (Auerbach, 1989; Becher, 1986; Brown, 1989; Escobedo, 1983; Greenberg, 1989; Henderson, 1987).

A primary concern of educators today is the involvement of poor minority parents in the education of their children. Much has been written about how essential parent participation is for poor minority children and about the difficulties that teachers face in implementing activities and programs with their parents (Adorno de Santiago, 1991; Ascher, 1988; Auerbach, 1989; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Greenberg, 1989).

Research has noted that poor Hispanic parents, in particular, "seem to be less knowledgeable about their children's educational programs and less involved than parents of both Black and Caucasian youngsters in the same programs" (Zela-Koort & Nardine, 1991, p.1). Teachers often describe Hispanic parents as apathetic, uncooperative, and hard to reach. At the same time, educators working with Hispanic parents have explained their frequent lack of involvement as the result of hectic schedules, difficult living conditions, the negative impact of their own schooling, and/or a lack of English skills. Such parents may maintain a respectful distance from the teacher, supporting her but not teaching themselves. Or they may be uncomfortable with the

expectations of teachers who may be critical of them (Bermúdez & Padrón, 1990; Greenberg, 1989; Nicolau & Ramos, 1991; Ramirez, 1990).

Using a case study approach, this article describes one aspect of parent involvement: parent-child interactions in the homes of three Puerto Rican kindergartners. Its purpose was to explore patterns of interaction and language use associated with teaching and learning. The goal was not to make generalizations to all Puerto Rican parents but to provide insight into what appear to be learning interactions in these homes.

The data presented here were gathered as part of an ethnographic study that compared question use in the three homes and the children's English-only kindergarten classroom (Volk, in press). As the transcripts from that investigation were reviewed, broader patterns of interaction emerged that contradicted the view of Hispanic parents as uninvolved in their children's learning. Thus, this case study suggests that generalizations about the involvement of poor Hispanic parents may provide little insight into the actual practice of individual parents with their children. Learning interactions occurred in all three homes, they differed from home to home, and there were a variety of interactions within each home.

It should be noted that there is little research on adult-child interactions in the homes of poor Spanish-speaking children which can be used as a comparison to these data. What does exist focuses on Mexican-American children (Alvarez, 1986; Delgado-Gaitan, 1983; Gallimore & Goldenberg, in press; Goldenberg, 1987; Vásquez, 1990). Research on Puerto Rican children has been experimental (Diaz Soto, 1988) or has described overall patterns of language use and interaction (Attinasi, Pedraza, Poplack, & Pousada, 1982).

Review of the Literature

Definitions of parent involvement

Most of the work praising parent involvement provides no definition of its practice. A recent review of the research (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991) does suggest an operational definition, indicating that parents can play different roles when involved in their children's education. These include: parent as audience; parent as paraprofessional; parent as teacher of own child; parent as learner; parent as decision maker.

Notably, most of the research that discusses the "parent as teacher of own child" role describes the parent as conducting school-like activities at home (Greenberg, 1989; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Auerbach (1989), in a critique of this view as it applies to the development of literacy, argues that its goal is "to strengthen the ties between the home and the school by transmitting the culture of school literacy through the vehicle of the family" (p. 169). She labels this the "transmission of school practices" model.

Teachers of poor minority children using this model tend to guide their work with two questions: How can I best communicate information about school work to these parents? How can I draw these parents into school-like activities that will support their children's on-going work? This model encourages teachers to focus on the obstacles that prevent parents from being more like teachers (Auerbach, 1989).

Auerbach (1989) also argues that this model is based on the assumption that school practices are adequate and that what happens at home makes the critical difference in children's school achievement. In contrast, she suggests that it is often school factors that make the critical difference, particularly as children grow older and proceed in their school careers.

Another, broader view of the "parent as teacher of own child" role focuses on a parent's involvement in the many meaningful contexts of the child's life that facilitate learning. Auerbach (1989) calls this a "social-contextual" model because, she argues, the social contexts of children's lives are integral to their learning, not obstacles. Given this perspective, activities such as conversations and supermarket trips can be understood as parent involvement. In contrast to the previous model, this one often leads teachers to ask: What strengths and skills do parents have that are relevant to the development of their children? How can I build on what parents actually do in my work with children? (Auerbach, 1989). The teacher's focus is on her own practice with children and parents rather than on their failings.

Because of the inclusiveness of the social-contextual definition and its positive view of learning at home, it was helpful in identifying learning interactions in this study. But Auerbach's insistence that school factors--not home factors--are the primary determinant of children's school performance was not accepted. Instead, the data collected here suggest that learning at home and learning at school must be considered in dynamic relation to each other when attempting to understand how children do in school.

Research on Hispanic families

Recent research describing the participation of poor Hispanic parents in their children's education raises two relevant issues. The first is discussed by Reese, Goldenberg, Loucky, and Gallimore (1989) and Goldenberg (1989) in their studies of the development of literacy in Mexican-American children and by Diaz Soto (1988) in her study of Puerto Rican fifth and sixth graders. These authors argue that status variables such as race and class are

reliable predictors of school achievement only with aggregate units of analysis such as the school or neighborhood. When the unit of analysis is the individual child, status variables are not reliable and researchers and practitioners must look to practices within each home in their efforts to understand individual children's learning. This position helps explain the variablity the researchers found in the educational assistance parents provided. Though all the parents were poor, some provided no educational experiences or encouragement, some provided minimal support, and others provided abundant support.

The second issue raised by the research is about continuities and discontinuities between the values and practices of poor Hispanic families and those of classrooms (Alvarez, 1986; Delgado-Gaitan, 1983; Gallimore & Goldenberg, in press; Goldenberg, 1987; Reese et al., 1989). Goldenberg (1987) suggests that more recent research emphasizing "cultural difference" as well as older research emphasizing "cultural deprivation" have focused on discontinuities as an explanation for children's academic failure. Both have ignored the continuities that exist between home and school settings. For example, the poor Mexican-American parents in Goldenberg's study (1987) believed in the value of education, understood its importance, and acted on this belief. Similarly, Reese et al. (1989) and Diaz Soto (1988) describe a strong desire among parents to support their children's education and concrete efforts by many to help them.

Methods

The neighborhood

The study took place in a large Midwestern city. Its public schools serve

more than 4500 Hispanic children who make up the largest language minority group within the system and represent 6% of the school population. Hispanic children have both the highest dropout rate and the lowest average reading scores of any group. Seventy-six percent are eligible for the free lunch for children from low income families. About 95% of these Hispanic children are Puerto Rican (Vishnevsky, 1991). The city and several nearby towns have been home to large, stable Puerto Rican communities since before World War II.

The school and the three homes were located in a poor neighborhood whose population has long been mixed. African-American, Hispanic, and white families--many recently arrived from Appalachia--live in distinct pockets throughout the area. Along business streets, families live in apartments in two- or three-story buildings. Side streets are lined with trees and small wood frame houses, many divided into small apartments.

The subjects: The children

The three children--Brenda, Bernardo, and Luis--were Puerto Rican and English dominant. English dominant children were defined as non-balanced bilinguals who use English more competently and in more contexts than Spanish. The subjects were initially rated as English dominant by the school system which routinely tests new students. These assessments were confirmed during the observations and interviews. The observations also revealed that the children had, at minimum, a receptive knowledge of Spanish.

Brenda and Luis were 6.1 and 6.3 years old, respectively, when the tapings began; Bernardo was 5.4. All three were labelled "at risk" because they had received scores of 40 or less out of 60 on the fall administration of the kindergarten developmental assessment. All were eligible for the free

lunch program. Brenda had completed a year of preschool; Luis had attended a day care center; Bernardo had no previous schooling.

Procedures

Ethnographic techniques were used to gather contextual data and audio recordings of adult-child interactions in the classroom and the three homes. Between September and January participant observations in the kindergarten classroom were conducted biweekly. The entire morning session was taped on six occasions. Many informal conversations were conducted with the teacher and she was interviewed that year and the following one.

Contact was made with parents at the school and initial conversations were followed by visits to the home. Between September and February, participant observations, interviews, and informal conversations took place in all three homes; audiotapings were conducted for about six hours in each. In two of the homes, visits and tapings occurred on weekday afternoons; in the third home, they occurred on Saturday afternoons.

Given the presence of the researcher in the homes, it is reasonable to ask whether the observations and tapings recorded everyday interactions. As will be seen, the data suggest that while one of the mothers occasionally did interact in ways she thought she should, most often all three appeared to be interacting with their children in typical ways, especially as time went on. Thus, as Tizard and Hughes (1984) argue, the conditions under which the data were recorded "may have affected the proportion of 'good' behaviour [the mothers] displayed, but nothing in the transcripts suggested that they acted in unusual or uncharacteristic ways" (p.259).

Report cards and other formal assessments of school performance were collected during the year of the study and the following fall. Profiles of the

children's work in school were compiled from these data, the observations, interviews, and informal conversations.

All of the tapes were transcribed by the researcher and an assistant, native English speakers who speak Spanish, and by a transcriber/translator who also translated the Spanish passages. This latter person is Puerto Rican, a native Spanish speaker who speaks English and has lived near the school.

As a part of the transcription process, utterances were identified. These were defined as breath units, the words used between longer pauses needed for taking a breath. Reliability of transcription was established at 98%.

For the study of question use, all questions were coded for form, function, setting, speaker, language, and interaction type. For this paper, the focus was on the parent-child interactions and the language used. Two interaction types were identified in the home transcripts: instructional with small group or individual; informal with small group or individual. They were distinguished by the apparent intent of the mother, topic, group size, and the presence or absence of "teacher talk" as described in the study on question use (Volk, in press). In that work, the identified elements of teacher talk included: the use of known information questions and unfinished declaratives to evaluate children's knowledge and elicit attributes or information ("Who did Clifford see?"/"Starts with..."); the use of prefatory questions to link past and present activities ("What was that word we studied last week?"); the use of requests for confirmation to focus on relevant information ("[Listen to the sounds,] ok?"); the use of questions as polite imperatives ("Can you open it?"). Typically these forms are used by teachers in the initiation-response-evaluation sequence (Mehan, 1979) that solicits information from children and follows their response with an evaluative comment.

It is important to note that the use of the social-contextual perspective made it apparent that many of the interactions identified as informal might also be learning experiences for the children. Informal conversations gave the children opportunities to initiate topics, ask questions, review past experiences, and provide explanations (Tizard & Hughes, 1984).

Patterns in the appearance of the interaction types and of language use within them were identified and interpreted within the context of all the data collected. These interpretations were developed in relation to the literature and to insights provided by an educational researcher and the transcriber/ translator, both Puerto Rican.

Results

The homes: Patterns of language and learning

As one measure of the learning interactions in the homes, frequencies were calculated for utterances used during instructional interactions and informal interactions. This comparison was based on the transcripts from about the first two hours taped in each home. Table 1 shows the distribution of children's and adults' utterances in the interaction types.

Insert Table 1 about here

As can be seen, 49% of all the utterances were used during interactions in which the mothers appeared to have an instructional intent, focused on school content, and/or used aspects of teacher talk. Fifty-one percent of the utterances were used during informal interactions. Differences between the three mothers are also apparent and will be discussed below.

The following descriptions are also based on patterns in the qualitative data that reflect both the differences and the similarities in language use and interactions in the three homes. Representative examples of mother-child talk are presented. Examples of informal interactions that appeared to contribute to the children's learning are also included.

Brenda and her mother. Brenda was a talkative girl with long brown hair, pale tan skin, and an engaging smile. She lived with her mother, Edna, 8-year-old sister, and baby brother in an apartment building. Brenda spent most of her time at home playing quietly by herself or raucously with her sister and friends. At other times she visited her grandparents or father.

Edna was born in Puerto Rico; she completed three years of high school there and came to the city six years ago. The previous year, she had volunteered in Brenda's preschool class but had stopped because Brenda was difficult to discipline when she was in the room. Edna believed it was the parent's role to support the teacher in disciplinary matters so that the teacher could "do her job". She wanted Brenda to go to college but was concerned because Brenda was already saying she did not like school. Brenda's sister declared that she loved school and wanted to be a teacher.

Edna spoke both English and Spanish to her children; the girls responded only in English, though they did speak Spanish to their baby brother. Edna felt it was important for her children to learn Spanish at home while developing a good grasp of English at school and expressed frustration over this situation. During the observations and tapings, Edna spent her time talking briefly to Brenda about her day at school, scolding Brenda and her friends when they were noisy, watching television, and talking with friends.

Many of Edna and Brenda's interactions fit the stereotype of parent-child exchanges in poor homes. As shown in Table 1, most of their utterances were used during informal interactions; there was little instructional talk. Moreover, much of Edna's talk to her daughter contained directives and empty threats that stifled conversation. Example 1 shows a typical exchange: Brenda and two friends played while Edna watched television.

Example 1

Edna: ¡Bren! ¿Qué tu haces?
[What are you doing?]

Brenda: I'm playing.

Edna: ¿Con qué? [With what?]

Brenda: With the bat.

Edna: No les estés dando.
[Don't be hitting them.]

Brenda: No. I was going like...

Edna: Te lo quito y te doy en la cara con él. [I'll take it away from you and hit you in the face with it.]

In contrast, there were other times when Brenda and her mother sparred verbally as if they were peers. These exchanges appeared to foster Brenda's ability to interact verbally in an assertive manner. While complaining about Brenda's disrespect, Edna appreciated these qualities in her daughter.

Example 2 is an exchange that occurred as Edna, Brenda, and her sister Katie played Nintendo. The girls are able to talk and assert their expertise

here because they know more about the game than their mother does. They are teaching her even as they expand their own verbal skills.

Example 2

Edna: Ooo I didn't knew that one.
(refers to game move)

Katie: Yup. There's one up there Mom.

Edna: All right. I knew that one.

Katie: Don't show Mami these.

Brenda: Can you shut up Katie?

Edna: (laughs)

Katie: Don't show Mami these.

Edna: People-everybody's talking. It's not only Katie. So. You better watch your language. Oye.
[Listen.]

Brenda: You could hit the mushroom and go under there like I do. And hit it.

Edna: For what?

Brenda: Because it's a trick I learned. You could still hit the mushroom.

Edna: Uh uh.

Brenda: She still could get a mushroom and do that. It still could count.

Edna: Oh! I learned that trick.

Thanks a lot.

Katie: Oh my god. My mommy's learning everything.

At other times, Brenda was expected to play quietly by herself and she often used these opportunities to review information she had learned at school. During one observation, for example, she played for half an hour with a deck of cards identifying the numbers and talking about them to herself.

Bernardo and his mother. Bernardo was a small, quiet, boy with brown skin, dark curly hair, and big brown eyes. He lived with his mother, Nola, and 8-year-old brother, in an apartment in the back of Nola's parents' house. Nola's sister and new baby, as well as other relatives, lived nearby. Bernardo usually played indoors; his mother sometimes took him to a local playground.

Nola was born in the city and had completed high school there. She worked occasionally with Bernardo's father doing construction work. Nola devoted much of her energy and thought to raising her children and protecting them from the dangers of the neighborhood. She spoke frequently with the teacher, reviewed homework rigorously, and had taught her children their letters and numbers when they were young. A huge jar in Bernardo's room was used for collecting money that was part of a college fund. Nola spoke disparagingly of many other Puerto Rican parents who, she said, neglected their children.

Nola used only English at home because she believed that competence in English was critical to school success. She did note that Bernardo understood his grandparents' Spanish.

As can be seen in Table 1, almost three quarters of Nola's utterances were used in instructional interactions. During the observations and tapings she read Bernardo stories and questioned his understanding of them, reviewed his homework, played a game of Sorry with him, and helped him with a computer game. She also spent time discussing family members and events with him and talking to her sister while Bernardo played quietly by himself.

Example 3 is typical of the many instructional interactions. Nola sounds very much like the teacher here with her use of teacher talk: questions and unfinished declaratives evaluating Bernardo's knowledge; requests for confirmation; the initiation-response-evaluation sequence.

Example 3

Nola: Oh ok. Guh girl.

Bernardo: Guh girl.

Nola: Ok now. Guh girl. Does that start with a g? Guh girl. Guh gum. Listen to the sounds, ok?

Bernardo: Gum does. Yeah.

Nola: Guh gum. Guh girl. Both starts with a g, right? Ok. Huh horn. Guh gum. Huh horn. They sound the same?

Bernardo: No.

Nola: No because it has huh, huh, huh, right? Instead of guh, guh, guh sound. Ok. Guh gate. Say it.

Bernardo: Guh gate.

Nola: Ok.

Bernardo: I know it starts with it.

Nola: Uh hum. What is this one?

Bernardo: Guh gum.

Nola: Right.

Bernardo: Start.

Nola: Starts with?

Bernardo: The. Gum. J. No. G?

Nola: Uh hum. Now. Come on!

Nola also seemed to be aware of the educational potential in everyday happenings. For example, while Bernardo was snacking, he showed the researcher a package of Quik, noting that he knew it was strawberry flavored because the picture on the front was pink. His mother then asked him what color the picture would be if the flavor were chocolate.

Nola's insistence on teaching met some resistance from Bernardo who occasionally said that he was tired or just stopped playing. His enthusiasm was more evident when he and his mother talked informally about shared experiences and family. This type of interaction seems to have provided Bernardo with opportunities to develop both verbal and thinking skills in the context of a warm, close conversation.

In Example 4, Bernardo and his mother are talking as they play Sorry. Bernardo reminds his mother how he used to climb to her shoulders and flip off when he was smaller. He asks if he can do it now and she replies that that he is too big and heavy.

Example 4

Bernardo: How about if I grow little?
And then I'm this-this small.

Nola: You're too big now. You
ain't going back to little.

Bernardo: How about-what if I go to-how
about if I be ten? After.

Nola: You can't do it. I could
take you to the playground.

Bernardo: When? Today. Today you could.

Luis and his mother. Luis was a shy, thin, boy with light brown skin, and straight brown hair. He lived with his mother, Juana, father, 9 year-old-brother, and 4-year-old sister in an apartment. He usually played indoors with siblings or friends or visited his grandparents.

Juana completed high school in Puerto Rico and came to the city six years ago. From her older sister she learned that parents were expected to be involved in their children's schooling. Now she volunteered in the classroom and served on several parent committees. She spoke of the frustrations of trying to involve other Puerto Rican parents who were "not motivated" and did not understand why their participation was important.

As shown in Table 1, three quarters of Juana's utterances were used during informal interactions, a quarter during instructional ones. In both types of interaction, Juana and her children used English and Spanish. Juana believed it was important for her children to speak Spanish and to know about Puerto Rican culture.

During the observations and tapings, the children played and talked with each other and their mother. They watched television together; Juana talked with her sister, completed chores, cooked, and directed the children's behavior and reprimanded them. At one point, Juana brought out a checkers game and reviewed the rules. Interestingly, it is then that her informal talk changed into teacher talk. Her question, "¿Qué colores son esos?", is used to evaluate Luis' knowledge. "¿Puedes abrirlo?" is a polite imperative that contrasts with the direct orders that she gave at other times. Juana also uses the initiation-response-evaluation sequence.

Example 5

Luis: Yo no se jugar. [I don't know how to play.]

Juana: Vamos. [Let's go.]

Juana: ¿Qué colores son esos? [What colors are these?]

Luis: Red and black.

Juana: Red and black. Put them in here. (hands Luis bag) ¿Puedes abrirlo? [Can you open it?]

Luis: (opens bag)

Juana: Las red van aquí y las black van allá. [The reds go here and the blacks go there.]

Luis: ¿Las black allá? [The blacks there?]

Juana: Uh hum.

Luis: I'm red.

Juana: You're red. Ok.

On one occasion, Juana and Luis engaged in an instructional interaction that focused explicitly on culture. Juana asked Luis to recite some poems and songs, picking "America" and "Eensy Weensy Spider". She then asked him to recite "Llantos Antillanos", a classic Puerto Rican poem about pride in being black that is commonly memorized and recited in families.

The teacher and the children in school

The teacher, Mrs. Norris, had many years of experience. Though monolingual in English, she had once taught bilingual classes with a Spanish-speaking aide and had attended in-service sessions on cultural differences. Her classroom was divided into centers but its organization was very teacher-centered. Nonetheless, Mrs. Norris perceived herself as a teacher who valued participation. When she compared her class with those at the primary level, she described hers as more open and accommodating to children's input.

Mrs. Norris worked hard to involve parents in her classroom. Homework consisted of simple tasks for parents and children to do together. A monthly calendar of activities was sent home. Parents were invited to contribute to class parties and to participate in programs such as one that loaned parents a computer with educational games. Parents were called in when Mrs. Norris was concerned about a child; two formal parent meetings were held during the year. Though she was often frustrated by the lack of parent involvement, Mrs. Norris noted that she liked to teach kindergarten because of the opportunity to work with parents.

The participation of the three mothers in Mrs. Norris' parent involvement program varied. Bernardo's mother was observed helping him with this homework; Luis' mother sat him down to complete it; Brenda's mother asked about the homework which Brenda sometimes hid. All three had contributed to class parties; Bernardo had been allowed to borrow the computer and Brenda was planning to do so soon. All three had also been called in for special conferences to discuss problems with their children. Bernardo's mother was prompt and concerned as was Luis'. Brenda's mother broke several appointments and eventually came in to talk, explaining that she too had trouble controlling Brenda.

Brenda. In school, Brenda's behavior was similar to her behavior at home. She was talkative and lively, answering questions, volunteering information, and chatting with the teacher. During group time, Brenda often raised her hand to answer questions but just as frequently called out answers and responded to comments by Mrs. Norris that were addressed to the group. She was engaged and interested in the work.

The teacher enjoyed interacting with Brenda, saying that all classrooms should have at least one child like her. As an illustration of Brenda's ability, she noted that Brenda was learning letters and numbers quickly even though she had no preparation or support in this area at home.

But the teacher also predicted that Brenda would have difficulty the following year when she entered a first grade that was more structured and teacher-centered. She was afraid that Brenda would get into trouble because she was talkative. In fact, data collected during Brenda's first grade year indicate that this prediction was accurate. Brenda was doing unsatisfactory academic work and she was described as a discpline problem.

Bernardo. Bernardo's behavior in school was in many ways different than his behavior at home. In school, he was a quiet, watchful child who rarely answered questions or volunteered information. Both his mother and the teacher described him as "slow" at grasping concepts and getting work done. And both compared him unfavorably to his older brother who was doing well in school.

The teacher attributed what she called his passivity to the fact that his mother did too much for him. She described this as a cultural trait of Puerto Rican families. She was unaware of the fact that Nola put a lot of effort into teaching Bernardo and his brother to take care of themselves at home.

Reports of Bernardo's work during his first grade year show a change in his achievement. His behavior was still described as cooperative and obedient, though inattentive. But his progress in math and reading were now satisfactory and on grade level.

Luis. Like Bernardo, Luis tended to be watchful in school settings. He was described as a sensitive child who got upset if he felt the teacher were unfair. He was also a bright child who did well academically; better than his older brother according to Juana. At one point, the teacher discussed the possibility of sending him to an honors class in another school. The plan was eventually abandoned because of his sensitivity.

The following year, in first grade, Luis continued to excel in his school work. He was described as one of the brightest children in the class. His new teacher noted, however, that he sometimes talked too much and misbehaved when he felt things were not going his way.

Discussion

The case study presented here provides a brief view into the complexities

of parent involvement in three homes and into possible relationships between this involvement and children's practice in school. The social-contextual definition of parent involvement provided a framework for identifing a range of interactions that appeared to facilitate learning and for moving beyond a focus on school-like interactions characterized by direct instruction and the use of teacher talk.

Given this broad perspective, it is clear that the three mothers did use their knowledge and skills to support their children's learning and development. While the data collection process may have elicited more instructional behaviors and language than these mothers typically use, it is nonetheless evident that they possessed relevant knowledge and skills and did use them. Like other Hispanic parents described in the literature (Delgado-Gaitan, 1983; Goldenberg, 1987), they were able to provide some continuity between the values and practices of the home and school.

All three mothers asserted that they valued education and understood its importance. Learning interactions took place in all three homes. Some were informal and some had clear instructional intent. Some were marked by the use of teacher talk and some were not. Some were frequent, some were rare. While all three mothers displayed controlling behaviors that appeared to have a negative impact on their children, positive behaviors, concern, and planning for learning were also in evidence. The stereotypes of the poor Hispanic parent as apathetic and uncooperative or too busy and overwhelmed to be involved do not apply to these mothers.

Of course, it could be argued that this was not a typical group of mothers. They were all involved in their children's school. Compared to

parents in other studies, their levels of education were high. For example, Gallimore and Goldenberg (in press) report that the Mexican-American mothers they studied had an average of seven years of schooling.

In addition, this was a self-selected group. These were the mothers who agreed to be observed and to be taped in their homes. Therefore, while it is important not to generalize from this group to all poor Puerto Rican parents, it is possible to suggest that they represent one type of more assimilated and active parent.

Ironically, two of these mothers were critical of other Puerto Rican parents whom they described as uncaring and uninvolved. Attitudes such as these within one cultural group have rarely been addressed in the literature on families or on parent involvement.

Despite the similarities between these mothers, there were also differences between them. There was clear evidence of the within-group variability that has been described in other research about Hispanic families (Delgado-Gaitan, 1983; Goldenberg, 1989; Reese et al., 1989). Bernardo's and Luis' mothers both assumed the teaching role at times and used teacher talk. Nola used it while directly involved in academic instruction; Juana used it in learning interactions that were not overtly academic, like the checkers game. In contrast, Brenda's mother saw her role as a supporting one to the teacher. While she encouraged the development of verbal skills and checked on homework, she did not provide instruction herself. Notably, it was Brenda who initiated talk about numbers and letters. This pattern of child-initiated learning interactions has been described in other research in Mexican-American homes and those of other immigrant families (Auerbach, 1989; Reese et al., 1989). In this case however, Edna was never seen to respond to Brenda's efforts.

Differences between the three mothers were also evident in their attitudes and concerns about language and culture. All three expressed strong feelings about which language or languages should be used with their children. Nola used only English. Edna used English and Spanish though her daughters who resisted using Spanish. Juana also used both and her children responded in both languages. She also emphasized Puerto Rican culture more overtly and positively than the other two.

As noted earlier, this focus on learning within the family was not meant to imply that the family's behavior is the sole determinant of children's school performance. The observations in the homes and in the classroom suggest that it is the reciprocal relationship between learning at home and at school that is most relevant. Variables such as age, gender, and cultural norms appeared to play a role in that relationship.

For example, the language skills and assertiveness that Brenda was learning at home were valued to some extent in this kindergarten, particularly in a girl. A more child-centered first grade in which children's language use was encouraged might have enhanced Brenda's abilities and continued the progress begun in kindergarten.

Conversely, Bernardo's quietness in the classroom seems to be related to norms of appropriate behavior that he had learned at home. While politeness and deference to teachers were stressed at home, they became a drawback in a kindergarten where verbal participation, within limits, was valued.

Bernardo's mother's use of teacher talk for instructing him in phonics raises the issue of appropriate teaching practices most clearly. Though Nola's efforts were commendable, Bernardo's age and school behavior suggest that

formal instruction in phonics was inappropriate at that time both at home and at school. The homework papers that Mrs. Norris sent home that focussed almost exclusively on initial consonant sounds reinforced Nola's propensity to drill her children as she had probably been drilled in school. It is likely that the animated discussions between Bernardo and his mother were a more positive influence on his eventual school success than the structured lessons.

Finally, it is possible that Luis' mother's emphasis on cultural pride had a positive influence on Luis' school performance. One can speculate that his sensitivity to slights from his teachers would have been ameliorated if they had tried to integrate his culture into the classroom. Mrs. Norris made no such efforts nor did the first grade teacher.

Thus, the complexities of parent involvement in these homes can only be understood in relation to the teaching and learning that occurred in the classroom. If there is consistency between the two settings and if teaching is developmentally appropriate, it is more likely that children's school performance will be enhanced.

Implications for practice and research

Practice. The case study presented here is rich in implications for teaching practice. The first implication is that the social-contextual definition of parent involvement provides a way for teachers to move beyond stereotypes about poor minority parents to a more careful examination of the ways in which these parents faciliate their children's learning. Instead of focusing only on parents' replication of school-like activities, this approach can be useful to teachers in their efforts to identify the skills and knowledge parents have that are relevant to children's learning.

For example, Mrs. Norris' efforts to involve parents fit the "transmission of school practices" definition. While these efforts were apparently successful with the mothers in this study, it is likely that outreach based on the social-contextual model would be needed to involve parents who were less integrated into the school. Moreover, it is likely that Mrs. Norris' work with these mothers could have had a greater impact on their children's learning if she had used a social-contextual model.

This latter point leads to a second implication from the case study: teachers need to individualize their efforts if they are to build effectively on parents' strengths. In that light, work with Brenda's mother might focus on getting her back into the classroom as a volunteer and modelling appropriate and effective disciplinary techniques. Building on her verbal strengths, a teacher might work out a plan with her to respond to Brenda when she initiated learning interactions. Work with Luis' mother might encourage her to share aspects of her culture with the class, teaching the children songs and poems and discussing their meaning. In contrast, work with Bernardo's mother might focus more explicitly on teaching techniques. Storybooks to be read as homework would build on her concern and skill and help her begin to modify her teaching style to one that is more developmentally appropriate.

Third, the comparison of talk at home with talk in the children's kindergarten classroom described elsewhere (Volk, in press) suggests that the teacher could learn from the mothers about creating a language-rich environment (Becher, 1986). Mrs Norris most often used instructional, evaluative language that discouraged informal conversations in which children took an active role. All three mothers, in contrast, spent time talking to

their children about shared experiences, in the past and on-going. Because the mothers were not evaluating their children's knowledge, children's rights to speak were less restricted. Children talked more, asked more questions, and introduced topics more often at home than at school.

A similar contrast emerges from work by Tizard and Hughes (1984) of English middle- and working-class children at home and at preschool. Tizard and Hughes found that talk between parents and children was more complex and varied than talk between teachers and children precisely because of the shared experiences which are naturally a part of home life.

Thus, if one goal of teachers is to create a language-rich environment that will stimulate children to expand their language competencies, the model of talk at home is very relevant. It suggests that shared experiences are critical parts of a curriculum as are the opportunities to talk about those experiences free from the constraints of instruction and evaluation.

Overall, these three implications for teaching practice are based on important changes in the way teachers are trained and in the way that they work. In order to implement a social-contextual approach to parent involvement, teachers need to be able to spend time and energy learning more about the families of their students. They need support from their schools if they are to conduct home visits and organize parent meetings in sites outside the school. And, most importantly, pre- and in-service training should provide teachers with an opportunity to examine their beliefs about parents, to learn about research about parent involvement, and to learn techniques that can be tried out in field settings (Becher, 1986; Williams & Chavkin, 1986).

Research. Two implications for further research can be drawn from this case study. First, more ethnographic research is needed on parent-child learning interactions specifically in Puerto Rican families and, more generally, in families from a variety of cultural backgrounds. While the findings here confirm findings in some of the recent research on Hispanic families, more work is needed to further explore patterns of parent-child interaction and language use. More work is also needed describing parents' attitudes about parent involvement, how they see their role and that of other parents. If parent involvement is to be based on parents' skills and concerns, research must be able to provide practitioners with accurate information.

Second, the findings indicate the importance of studying the dynamic interaction of children's learning experiences at home in relation to their experiences in school and of the ways that this interaction changes from grade to grade and teacher to teacher. As argued in other work (Ascher, 1988; Delgado-Gaitan, 1983; Gallimore & Goldenberg, in press; Menacker, Hurwitz, & Weldon, 1988), the practice of both parents and teachers contributes to children's school performance and the practice of both may need to be improved in order to improve that performance.

In sum, the case study shared here confirms other research indicating that some poor Hispanic parents do provide a variety of learning experiences for their children. The data also suggest that a social-contextual approach to parent involvement can provide teachers of young children with a broad and inclusive perspective for recognizing parents' varied skills and tapping them as resources. Instead of trying to make homes more like schools, educators need to look for ways that they can work with parents so that parents and teachers can learn from each other about facilitating children's learning.

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Table 1

Utterances at Home by Interaction Type and Speaker

Speaker	Instructional w/ small grp/indiv		Informal w/ small grp/indiv		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Edna	20	6	333	94	353	100
Brenda	19	6	292	94	311	100
Nola	987	73	371	27	1358	100
Bernardo	508	61	320	39	828	100
Juana	152	25	451	75	603	100
Luis	64	47	71	53	135	100
Total	1750	49	1838	51	3588	100